

PAFC NEWS

POLITICAL ACTION FUND COMMITTEE NEWS

Volume II, No.1 • Fall 2011

GET INVOLVED!

The LRCFT's Political Action Fund Committee (PAFC), in an effort to reach out to all Los Rios faculty and make them aware of the PAFC's presence and positions, is publishing this second issue of informational newsletters

In this issue you will find a summary of those propositions on which the PAFC took a position and a more thorough explanation of all of the propositions appearing on the November 2 general election ballot along with the California Federation of Teachers' position on some of those propositions; and announcements of endorsements for local school board races and for the Area 7 seat on the Los Rios Board of Trustees.

We welcome your suggestions and comments. More importantly, we would welcome your participation on the PAFC and any donation you might want to make, either monthly through payroll deduction or a one-time-only offering.

It seems as if every election year we hear the cry that "This is the most important election ever." Well, this time around, there may actually be some truth to that. There are so many things at stake in this election that we are reluctant to list them, lest it appear as if we are prioritizing. Take your pick—the make-up of the Supreme Court for decades to come; the path the U.S. will take in fighting terrorism; health insurance for the uninsured; funding education; the make-up of the National Labor Relations Board and the list goes on.

If you wish to do more than mark your ballot, there are many opportunities to get involved. The phone bank schedule through October is Monday through Thursday 5:00 PM until 8:30 PM. Precinct walking takes place every Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. From October 30 until 8:00 PM on November 2, there will be a Get Out The Vote effort. If you are interested in precinct walking or phone banking, please call the Sacramento Central Labor Council at 927-9772 and ask for Mike.

Finally, no LRCFT dues or agency fee funds were expended on the production and printing of this newsletter. All expenses were provided by the voluntary contributions received from Los Rios faculty.

CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENTS & BALLOT PROPOSITIONS AT A GLANCE

The LRCFT PAFC's endorsements in local school board races and the Los Rios Board of Trustees

Area 7 of the Los Rios Board of Trustees: Kay Albiani

Natomas Unified School District:
Jennifer Baker

Sacramento City Unified School District: Miguel Navarette

San Juan Unified School District:
Lucinda Luttgren and Rick Launey

Roseville Joint High School District:
Jack Duran

Elk Grove Unified School District:
Fusako Yokotobi

LRCFT PAFC's Ballot Proposition recommendations at a glance (See following article for an in-depth look and CFT recommendations)

1A NO

59 YES

72 YES

BALLOT PROPOSITIONS – DETAILED

PROPOSITION 1A

Protection of Local Government Revenues. This measure amends the State Constitution to significantly reduce the state's authority over major local government revenue sources. Under the measure the state could not reduce local sales tax rates or alter the method of allocation; shift property taxes from local governments to schools or community colleges; decrease vehicle license fee revenues without providing replacement funding. Loans to the state from property tax revenues would be restricted to twice in any ten-year period. PAFC—NO

PROPOSITION 59

Public Records, Open Meetings. Legislative Constitutional Amendment. Provides that the people have the right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business. Provides that meetings of public bodies and writings of public officials and agencies shall be open to public scrutiny. PAFC—YES

PROPOSITION 60

Primary Elections (No Open Primaries). States who had a political party that participated in a primary election for a partisan office have the right to participate in the general election for that office and shall not be denied the ability to place on the general election ballot the candidate who received, at the primary election, the highest vote among that party's candidates. CFT—YES

PROPOSITION 60A

Sale of Surplus State Property. This is a legislative constitutional amendment that would require that the proceeds from the sale of surplus state property, with specified exceptions, be used to pay the principal and interest on bonds issued under the Economic Recovery Bond Act (Propositions 57 and 58 on the March 2004 ballot). Once the principal and interest on those bonds are fully paid, requires that the proceeds from the sale of surplus state property be deposited in the Special Fund for Economic Uncertainties. CFT—NO

PROPOSITION 61

Children's Hospital Projects. The state would sell \$750 million in bonds and repay it out of the general fund if this passes to expand capacity in Children's Hospitals across the state. For the next 30 years, an annual \$50 million bill will come due out of the state's general fund when, as it is, hospitals are not able to adequately staff the beds they do have. This is another attempt to push the fiscal burden for public services onto middle- and working-class communities and away from the wealthy and corporate interests that run state government.

This perhaps well-intentioned proposal is a poor use of taxpayers' money. Prioritizing solutions that both fix long-term structural problems with health care delivery (like the single payer plan in SB 921, see <http://www.healthcareforall.org/>) as well as more preferable. Like most bonds, this proposal would add debts that would make it harder to provide other necessary services from the state coffers without actually saying now either where that additional revenue would come from or what the state should cut to accommodate these obligations. Unfortunately, the CFT has recommended a YES vote on 61.

PROPOSITION 62

Primary Elections (Open Primaries). This is the so-called "open primary" sponsored by Steve Westley, Richard Riordan, and others, under which only the top two primary candidates, regardless of party affiliation, in the partisan races, would be allowed to advance to the general election. Therefore, if this proposition is approved by the voters, third parties will be shut out of virtually all general (November) elections in the future. CFT—NO

PROPOSITION 63

Mental Health Services Expansion and Funding. Provides funds to counties to expand services and develop innovative programs and integrated service plans for mentally ill children, adults and seniors. Requires state to provide mental health service programs including prevention, early intervention, education and training programs. Imposes additional 1% tax on taxable income over \$1 million to provide dedicated funding for expansion of mental health services and programs. CFT—YES

PROPOSITION 64

Limitations on Enforcement of Unfair Business Competition Laws. When a proposal has the backing of insurance companies (Blue Cross, Kaiser), large banks (Wells Fargo, Bank of America), the Chamber of Commerce and numerous auto dealers, it's time to be alert. This proposition aims to limit the rights of individuals and public interest organizations to sue to enforce unfair business competition laws. Many consumer protection laws have come as a result of public interest cases brought by nonprofit groups that have identified problems in the course of their work. Two hundred eighty-five projected layoffs in the Attorney General's office make state enforcement of these laws harder to fathom. CFT—NO

PROP 65

Local Government Funding and State Mandates. Prop 1A and Prop 65 are competing initiatives for protecting local government funding sources (property tax, sales tax, and vehicle license fees) from reductions and adjustments by the State Legislature. Prop 1A is a negotiated compromise by the Governor and Legislature and is being promoted by them and the League of Cities in lieu of Prop 65, which was placed on the ballot earlier this year and prior to the State budget negotiations. CFT—NO

PROP 66

Limitations on the “Three Strikes” Law. The public’s fear, anger and perception of crime is understandable (although, perhaps not grounded in reality). Many well-intentioned voters may have supported the “Three Strikes” law as a way to protect the innocent from violent criminals. But facts and experiences, not widely known, except by the families whose lives have been destroyed by the “Three-Strikes” law, demonstrate that the people of California are not well-served by the “Three Strikes” law.

In 1994, Californians intended to put away murderers and rapists for life, but less than 5% of the more than 47,000 people in California’s prisons serving their second and third strikes are there for murder and rape. Over 4,000 are serving 25-years to life for nonviolent crimes and of these, 353 are in prison for life for petty theft, a crime which usually carries a six-month prison term.

The law needs to be amended for many reasons but the biggest reason is because it is an unjust law applied almost exclusively to poor people, and particularly to poor people of color. African-Americans make up 7% of the California population, over 31% of the California prison population, and 44% of the “Third Strike” population.

“Three Strikes” is part of the nationwide \$200 billion crime control industry producing misery at one end and super profits at the other end. A father is sent to prison for petty theft and his child is sent to foster homes until he, too, becomes fodder for the prison system.

Currently there are 162,120 people in California’s prisons at an average annual cost of \$30,929 per prisoner. The estimated \$5.7 billion could provide homes, jobs and restore California’s educational system. CFT—YES

PROP 67

Telephone Surcharge for Emergency Medical Services. Although the premise of Proposition 67 seems reasonable—a minor telephone tax to pay for uncompensated emergency and trauma medical care performed by hospitals, doctors and clinics (revenue estimated at \$500 million annually)—the proposition also includes both unfortunate details and deceptive language.

For example, aside from the telephone tax, Prop 67 mandates that each county must also establish a Maddy Fund (previously optional and generally comprised of “specified revenues from criminal fines and penalties”) that would be administered by the state. While provisions are made for counties to apply for control of some portion of those funds, the mandating of new county funds and the shifting of control of such funds to the state should be avoided. This is of particular concern when the proposition appears to voters to be only a telephone tax. It is estimated that \$32 million in revenue each year would be raised and transferred from county Maddy Funds to the state.

Furthermore, the actual allocation of the funds seems inappropriate and deceptive in its language. The fund is described as “the new 911 Emergency and Trauma Care Fund,” however, less than 1% of the money actually goes toward 911 emergency services, while 90% of the money goes toward hospitals (60%) and physicians (30%). The most highlighted groups get the least of the money—emergency and trauma first responders (training and related equipment for firefighters, paramedics and other first responders) get 3.75% and nonprofit community clinics get just 5%. While this may make sense in terms of actual costs, there is cause for concern that the real purpose of Prop 67 is deceptive in its message of helping 911 responders.

PROP 68

Tribal Gaming Pacts (Racetracks and Card Clubs Measure). Prop 68 was written by racetrack and card room owners to deal a blow to their business rivals, American Indian casinos. It should be rejected out of hand. CFT—NO

PROP 69

Collection of DNA Samples for State DNA Database. Prop 69 is another assault on civil liberties and privacy rights in the name of “fighting crime.” Prop 69 allows the state to forcibly collect DNA samples from people arrested for specific crimes. Starting in 2009, Prop 69 provides that anyone arrested for any felony would be forced to provide a DNA sample.

One would not even have to be charged with a crime, much less convicted, in order to be forced to “give” a sample. This is a blow to the important legal protection of being presumed innocent until proven guilty. This measure also compromises the constitutional right not to incriminate oneself. CFT—NO

’ R O P 70

Tribal Gaming Compacts (Agua Caliente Measure). Prop 70 is more complicated than Proposition 68 (see above). People have widely differing views on gambling and the wisdom of having gambling provide a major source of government funding. One starting point is the historic position of American Indians before gaming. Many of the remaining American Indians lived on reservations that were mired in poverty and despair. Gaming has improved the lives of many American Indian people. Prop 70 would expand gaming, but also would require that a fixed amount be given to the State by gaming tribes.

Some of the opposition has some validity. Some people are philosophically opposed to gambling. Some environmentalists object that construction projects on tribal land do not require the same environmental scrutiny. The AFL-CIO opposes tribal gaming because labor law, including the right to form unions, is not as strong on tribal land.

However, much of the opposition may be based on envy tinged with racism. Gaming money has made California gaming tribes real players in state politics, which does not please everyone. While one can oppose the money-driven political system, the fact is that American Indians did not create the system. CFT—NO

’ R O P 71

Stem Cell Research and Funding. The California Stem Cell Research and Cures Act would direct the state to issue \$3 billion in general obligation bonds. It would establish the “California Institute for Regenerative Medicine” to disburse up to \$350 million a year for stem cell research. The Institute would be run by a committee whose members (designated in the law) would be drawn from academia, biotech companies, and patient advocacy groups. The Act seeks to amend the state’s Constitution to provide a constitutional right to conduct stem cell research.

With interest on the bonds, taxpayers are asked to commit \$6 billion (over 30 years) to a project that could potentially benefit a lot of people. However, as usual, private industry would reap the profits of research paid for by taxpayers. If the Constitution is to be amended, would it not make more sense to establish a constitutional right to health care for all? Certainly, \$6 billion for health care would more quickly and surely help people if spent on known treatments for well-understood conditions for the millions of uninsured Californians. Additionally, there are arguably higher priorities for research, such as an AIDS vaccine. Finally, there has been little public discussion of what kind of public oversight would be best.

This looks like an industry strategy to bypass serious discussion by jumping straight to the TV ads showing suffering people waiting for a miracle cure. In spite of this, CFT has endorsed a Yes on 71.

’ R O P 72

Referendum Petition to Overturn Amendments to Health Care Coverage Requirements (Health Insurance Act of 2003). Health care for all as a human right has a long, long way to go. Many other countries provide universal health care within their borders, or some approximation—wealthy countries (Western Europe, Canada, Japan) and poor countries (Cuba, Mexico), more or less, well or not so well. The very wealthy country we live in doesn’t even try.

In the 1960’s, the nationwide debate about health care access in the U.S. brought us Medicare and Medicaid (called MediCal in California) which sort of cover the elderly and the very poor. In the 1990’s, the nationwide debate brought us a lot of failed reform efforts. (For example, Prop 186 for single-payer universal health care in California went down to serious defeat in 1994.) Currently, another attempt to achieve universal single-payer health care in California, Senator Sheila Kuehl’s SB 921, passed the state Senate in 2003 and is inching through committees in the Assembly.

This brings us to the man on horseback, State Senator John Burton, who sponsored SB 2, a “Play or Pay” bill, mandating that medium-to-large employers provide affordable health care (or pay into a state fund). Gray Davis signed this bill into law. This is truly a crumb—a small piece of what we need. It is expected to cover one million of the seven million California uninsured. So, the Chamber of Commerce has financed the opposition to SB 2, to try to stop implementation of this crumb. The California Labor Federation has made saving SB 2 a priority. Save our crumbs! PAFC—YES